Man Cited in Nixon Threat Gives Up in Southwest

By ROY REED

ARROYO HONDO, N. Mex., Aug. 22 — Edwin M. Gaudet, who was accused of threatening President Nixon's life last week in New Orleans, surrendered to Federal and local officers today after almost two days of hiding in the rugged mountains of northern New Mexico.

Mr. Gaudet was not available for questions but his friends and neighbors maintained that the entire episode had been a case of mistaken dientity. They said he was here Aug. 15, the day the alleged threat was made in New Orleans.

Federal and local officials in New Orleans continued to investigate another, separate report of a conspiracy to kill Mr. Nixon during his visit to New Orleans Monday. There was no apparent connection between that supposed conspiracy and

Persuaded to Give Up

Mr. Gaudet surrendered at noon on a dusty, rocky mountain road about a mile from this village after his wife and a cousin, Stanley Gaudet, found him last night and persuaded him to give himself up.

Dozens of local policemen and Federal Secret Service agents who had been searching for him agreed to pull back and let his wife and cousin try to bring him out.

Mr. Gaudet, 33 years old, a former New Orleans policeman, had spent two nights and part of two days hiding among the low juniper and piñon trees in the canyons and foothills of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.

He and his wife and two children have lived for a year at the Morning Star commune on land owned by Michael Duncan, a young native of North Carolina. The commune has disintegrated and most of its members have left. Mr. Duncan, who tired of having the commune on his land, got a court order in March evicting the group. Only the Gaudets and two other families remained.

In spite of his dissatisfaction with the commune, Mr. Duncan defended Mr. Gaudet against the charge that he had been overheard in a New Orleans bar saying that someone should kill the President and that he would be willing to do it if no one else would.

"It Couldn't Be Eddie"

"We told the Federal officers that it couldn't possibly be Eddie," Mr. Duncan said this afternoon after the surrender. "He had been back from New Orleans a week when that [the threat] occurred."

Mr. Duncan said he thought that the New Orleans police had informed the Federal officers of Mr. Gaudet because "they had it in for him."

Mr. Gaudet left the New Orleans police force under a cloud several years ago. He was accused at the time of having "shot up" a French Quarter bar for no apparent reason. Mr. Duncan said that Mr. Gaudet had told him that he resigned because he disapproved of some police practices in New Orleans, such as "robbing drunks of their money."

Mr. Gaudet has a reputation among his friends for quick-tempered, impestuous behavior. They say he likes to carry a riffle and that he frequently wears an ammunition belt over his shoulders.

An impulsive act by Mr. Gaudet might have been responsible for expending an attempt to arrest him into a massive man hunt. He ran off Monday while a Federal officer was examining his identification card at the commune. A little later he and some local policemen exchanged gunfire.

Details Disputed

Whether they fired directly at each other is disputed. A policeman was quoted as saying that Mr. Gaudet had fired at the policeman from a thicket and that they had fired back at him. Mr. Duncan said Mr. Gaudet had told some friends, whom he reached while in hiding, that the officers had fired warning shots over his head and that he had responded by firing one shot into the ground to warn them not to come closer.

Friends say that Mr. Gaudet remained in hiding because he feared that law-enforcement officers would shoot him if he showed himself. His wife and cousin persuaded him at one point last night to surrender. But as they prepared to drive to a road to meet the officers a car drove up a hill toward them. He ran off again, saying he had been tricked.

His wife and cousin found him again and told him that the driver of the car he had seen had merely been Mr. Duncan. Assured that the officers were keeping their word to stay back, he relented and drove with his relatives to a main road and surrendered, Mr. Duncan said.

Accused of Assault

The Taos County district attorney charged Mr. Gaudet this afternoon with three counts of assaulting a police officer with intent to kill.

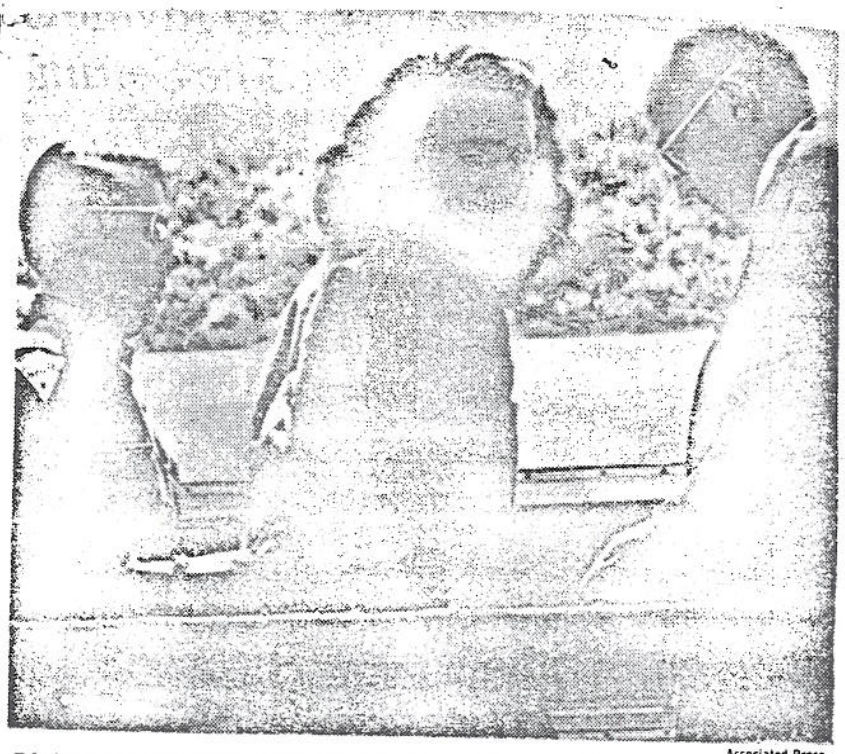
Mr. Duncan said he thought that the officers were on shaky legal ground because they had entered the commune and his property without a copy of an arrest warrant, which had been issued in New Orleans.

Mr. Duncan said he thought that Mr. Gaudet could have lived indefinitely hiding in the hills.

"He's a trained athlete, he's in perfect physical condition, he's 33 years old and he's spent many nights out in those hills," Mr. Duncan said, adding that water is plentiful from creeks and springs and food would be easy to find from campers.

The Gaudets apparently had a simple but poor life here. They have subsisted on food bought with Federal food stamps and vegetables raised in a garden. He has had no job.

Asked to describe Mr. Gaudet's politics, Mr. Duncan replied with apparent reluctance, "You might say he's a primitive, simple, agrarian communist. I hesitate to use the word communist because people might misunderstand. He believes that people ought to have a chance to work the land. He's not an angry young man, not the revolutionary type who says, 'Let's burn it down.'"



Associated Press

Edwin M. Gaudet between state and U.S. officers after surrender at Arroyo Hondo, N. M.